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LUCIANO BERIO'S *SEQUENZA I PER FLAUTO*: 1958 AND 1992

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The 14 *Sequenze* for solo instruments of twentieth-century Italian composer Luciano Berio, remain firmly situated within the canon of twentieth-century *avant-garde* art music. They represent exemplary products of *avant-garde* composition, extended techniques, and new virtuosic difficulties of performance. Berio began this series of *Sequenze* with *Sequenza I* for flute in 1958. It is especially curious that he then later revised the piece and republished it in a new version in 1992. This paper will examine the performance practice and history of this piece in its two extant published versions.

Luciano Berio was an Italian composer born in Oneglia, an area in northern Italy, on October 24, 1925, and passed away in Rome on May 27, 2003. He is known for his work with experimental music and for somewhat venturing into the realms of electronic music. Both his father and grandfather were musicians and taught him the basics of music before he attended the Conservatorio di Musica in Milan. Around 1950 he married the American mezzo-soprano singer Cathy Berberian and in 1953, their first child, Cristina, was born.¹ At the end of 1954, Berio and Bruno Maderna “created Italy’s first studio of electronic music at the RAI Milan headquarters, inaugurated the following year as the Studio di Fonologia Musicale. Here he was able to experiment with the interaction of acoustic instruments and electronically produced sounds...”² Four years later, he started his works on the 14 *Sequenze* for solo instruments beginning with the flute in *Sequenza I*.³ *Sequenza* is the Italian term for sequence which means the following of one thing after another in succession. When he created these

¹ Luciano Berio, “Luciano Berio,” [Official Personal Website], *Centro Studi Luciano Berio*; available from <http://www.lucianoberio.org/en/node/1019>; Internet; accessed 10 April 2013.

² Luciano Berio, “Biography,” [Official Personal Website], *Centro Studi Luciano Berio*; available from <http://www.lucianoberio.org/en/node/1154>; Internet; accessed 10 April 2013.

³ *Ibid.*

14 *Sequenze* for solo instruments, he had it in mind that composition is an ongoing process. “This series of solo works...exemplifies Luciano Berio’s approach to composition as “work in progress,” conceived as a potentially never-ending process of comment and elaboration which continues and proliferates from one piece to the next.”⁴ This approach to composition and his unique ideas are what made Berio an influential composer in the twentieth-century.

Before Berio’s *Sequenza I* was written, there were only two other unaccompanied flute solos in the ‘modern’ flute literature at the time – Claude Debussy’s *Syrinx* (1913) and Edgard Varèse’s *Density 21.5* (1936). Interestingly enough, these pieces have more in common than simply being the first three unaccompanied twentieth-century flute solos. Each of these works opens with a three-note chromatic motif; this is a “unifying thread” in all three works. Shown below are the first notes of each piece to demonstrate this concept:

Debussy’s *Syrinx*:Varèse’s *Density 21.5*:

⁴ *Ibid.*

Berio's *Sequenza I*:

As you can see, all of these works open with a three note chromatic motif. This idea of a three note chromatic motif, whether split apart by octaves or not, is all throughout each of these pieces.⁵ One can assume that each of these pieces influenced the later works, even though they were all separated by decades. Berio began working with the RAI (Radio Audizioni Italiane) in Rome in 1953 and met many people that he could use for his projects during the next decade.⁶ Severino Gazzelloni was the premier performer for Berio's flute *Sequenza*. Gazzelloni also worked at the RAI – he was the flute soloist for the Italian radio's Symphony Orchestra. "[Gazzelloni] became internationally known as an exponent of avant-garde music who premiered a vast repertoire of new works."⁷ The professional relationship between Berio and Gazzelloni played a major role in Berio's decision to write the piece for Gazzelloni. As with all of his *Sequenze*, Berio wrote with specific performers in mind and catered the piece to their individual style and personalities. This aspect becomes more prominent in the later *Sequenze*.⁸

Even though this piece was composed for Gazzelloni, Berio still had to revise it in 1992

⁵ Laura Toledo Domínguez, "Solo Flute Pieces Throughout the Twentieth Century: *Syrinx*, *Density 21.5* and *Sequenza I*," 2011, 8, 14, 21.

⁶ David Osmond-Smith, *Berio*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.

⁷ "Blue" Gene Tyranny, "Severino Gazzelloni," [Music Database], *AllMusic.com*; available from <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/severino-gazzelloni-mn0002182057>; Internet; accessed 16 April 2013.

⁸ See Joanna Wyld's 2005 unpublished article available online in PDF: <http://www.notes-upon-notes.com/pdf/Berio.pdf>.

because by the year 1966 he did not like how it was being performed in general and wanted to revise it. The first issue of the *Sequenza* was written using proportional notation and was the very first piece in which Berio used this type of notation. However, he felt that flutists did not understand the style or character of the piece because of this notation.⁹ Berio is quoted as saying to flutist Robert Dick:

*By the time I wrote Sequenza I, in 1958, I considered the piece so difficult for the instrument that I didn't want to impose on the player specific rhythmic patterns [...] But as a result, even good performers were taking liberties that didn't make any sense, taking the spatial notation almost as a pretext for improvisation. Certainly some sort of flexibility is part of the conception of the work...*¹⁰

In the revised version, Berio modified the original piece in order to simplify the rhythms and used conventional rhythmic notation as shown:¹¹

Example 1 – *Sequenza I*: the 1958 edition, phrase 1Example 2 – *Sequenza I*: the 1992 edition, phrase 1

⁹ Janet K Halfyard, *Berio's Sequenzas: Essays on Performance, Composition and Analysis*, (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

Example 3 – Typesetting of Berio's handwritten example of *Sequenza I* from a letter to Nicolet (1996)



By observing all three of these examples, one can clearly see that there are many different ways to interpret his *Sequenza I* just by altering the grouping of the notes and their relation to the original hash marks that were used to indicate pulse.¹² In an interview with the flute professor at Louisiana State University, Dr. Katherine Kemler, she states, “I first played it in 1975, so I obviously used the original version. However, because it was difficult to learn the notes when they were in such imperceptible patterns, my teacher... made our flute literature class rewrite the piece using 6/8 meter. We used a ruler to try to figure out the spatial relationships and transcribe them into a regular meter.”¹³ There is much debate within the flute community about which one is better. Dr. Kemler states:

*Most people from my generation who learned from the original do not like the new version. However, I had a guest artist for LFS at LSU year before last, Mihi Kim... and she used the new version and played it absolutely precisely rhythmically and it was fabulous! She even gave me her copy where she had meticulously figured out all the rhythms with exact meters and beat markings... So, I guess there are many ways to approach this piece, but I think it helps to have some kind of good rhythmic reference when learning it.*¹⁴

In an interview with the flute teacher at Southeastern Louisiana University, Mrs. Rachel Taratoot

¹² *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹³ Katherine Kemler, interviewed by author, email, Hammond, Louisiana, 6 May 2013.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Ciraldo, she explains her reason behind choosing which version to play by saying, “I had both copies and referenced both, but I preferred to use the 1958 version with proportional notation... I liked thinking in a relative time concept rather than a subdivision, if that makes sense. I could think more linearly and create melody from the individual gestures.”¹⁵ When Dr. Kemler says that most people from her generation who learned from the original do not like the new version, she is not incorrect. Yet, flutist Mihi Kim preferred to perform the new version and Mrs. Ciraldo, who is closer to the next generation, preferred to perform the original version.

So why did Berio write this piece in proportional notation to begin with? The answer – he didn’t! Paul Roberts was Berio’s assistant. Roberts actually transcribed the work to conventional notation for Berio later. Working closely with Berio, Roberts was able to explain about the birth of the *Sequenza I* and the reason behind why Berio rewrote it using proportional notation:

*The truth is that Berio originally composed the flute Sequenza in standard notation back in 1958. It was written using very strict serial rhythms, and was barred in 2/8 from start to end... This is the moment when proportional notation was ‘born’ because Berio rightly felt that the original notation was too awkward. He therefore proceeded to transform this Sequenza visually into the version that we all now know. Unfortunately, over the years, he became increasingly disappointed with how flute players approached this notation which is by no means as free as it seems. (This was the case, in effect, with all his proportionally notated pieces.) ... Just for the record, as far as I know, there is not a single piece of Berio’s that began life in proportional notation.*¹⁶

¹⁵ Rachel Taratoot Ciraldo, interviewed by author, email, Hammond, Louisiana, 6 May 2013.

¹⁶ Janet K Halfyard, *Berio's Sequenzas*, 15-16.

It seems that Berio was never happy with how his music was interpreted. Example 3 (above) is part of a letter Berio had written to flutist Aurèle Nicolet as she was preparing a recording of the *Sequenza* which she sent to him to gain his insight as to how she performed it. In the letter Berio states, “In your recording, there is a misunderstanding: it is with regard to the proportions of time and speeds. It is not so much the question of slower or faster speed, but rather – once the speed is selected – the proportions of the durations.”¹⁷ Berio felt that a little flexibility with the tempo is necessary, “But I only selected this ‘proportional’ notation in order to allow a certain accommodation for the interpreter in the extremely dense and quick passages. Each flutist can therefore adapt the degree of speed, but always keeping the indicated proportions...”¹⁸ Then, by attaching his typeset (Example 3) he shows features of both the 1958 and the 1992 editions. Roberts stated that his original manuscript, before the 1958 proportional notation was published, was in 2/8 meter. Then, when he transcribed it to proportional notation, Berio uses the hash marks to show this relationship. The fact that the typeset version is written in 2/8 relates the proportions and meter to the original version. When just looking at the note-to-note level of these examples, Example 3 resembles the 1992 version (Example 2) in bar one, but then in bar two, Example 3 more resembles the 1958 version (Example 1). Overall, Berio was not interested in the preciseness of the tempo, but rather the consistency of rhythmic proportions.¹⁹

There are more aspects that make this piece interesting and innovative in addition to the proportional notation. The work incorporates a lot of extended techniques – sounds that are made

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

beyond the typical flute sound. Robert Dick wrote a monograph titled *Tone Development Through Extended Techniques*.²⁰ When we play extended techniques, the tone of the sound will usually falter and sound dead or “tube-like” instead of how a flute should sound. This book gives great practice tips on how to practice these extended techniques and how to play them with a good tone. When tackling this piece, or any other piece that requires extended techniques, one should consider consulting a guide such as this. Berio’s *Sequenza I* incorporates flutter tonguing, some key clicks, whistle tones, harmonics, and even some multiphonics. Flutter tonguing is when the flutist will play a tone while “rolling an R” – as with the Spanish word ‘carro’.

Example 4 – Flutter tonguing

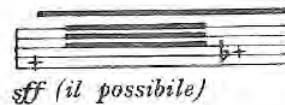


Some people are not able to use their tongue in this manner, in which case it is appropriate to “growl” in order to achieve the same effect. Flutter tonguing is easier to accomplish in the higher registers of the flute. This is because playing in the high register requires the air to be forced out at such a high speed that the tongue does not get in the way of the air stream. The lower register is where most flute players would need to work. Flutists tend to ease off of their air stream when playing lower notes for fear of over-blowing the note or cracking the note. Without the greater force of air in the low register, the tongue loses momentum and the flutter sound will either die out, or the tongue will cause too much interference with the air stream and the note will not sound. One should practice rolling the R, or growling, without the flute, but still blowing the phrase and notes as if you were playing. Once you

²⁰ The information in the section herein consists of information directly gleaned from Robert Dick’s monograph as well as the experience of this document’s author (Brandi Marino), a flutist.

have mastered that without the flutter sound dying out, use the flute and produce each note on a flutter slowly, then speed it up little by little so that the flutter still stays when changing between registers more quickly. Key clicks are a percussive sound made by the flute.

Example 5 – Key clicks



The performer is to hit, or slap, their fingers down on the keys for the pitches notated without blowing air through the flute. Air is forced through the tube by the pressure of the fingers and causes the note to sound in a percussive manner. When using an open-hole flute, it is imperative that the performer completely covers the keys with their fingers. Whistle tones, also known as whisper tones, require extreme air control in both speed and placement. Piano (p) and pianissimo (pp) are often used as normal dynamic range markings. Sometimes, one might even see a pianississimo (ppp)! Even though whistle tones are notated in the same manner, the performer should recognize whistle tones by the absurd amount of 'piano' markings.

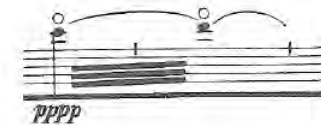
Example 6 – Whistle tones



Whistle tones are caused by using such a small amount of air that the flute's metal walls do not vibrate. The speed and angle of the air needs to be approached with great care. One should blow extremely slow, but focused air over the edge of the tone hole. The embouchure must remain relaxed, as should

the air stream. When first practicing whistle tones, the tongue should be left out, so that all notes begin with just the air. As the flutist progresses, the tongue can be used and even a light vibrato can be incorporated. It is important to note that the position of the tongue inside the mouth controls how loud or soft a whistle tone can be. Harmonics can be notated quite a few ways.

Example 7 – Harmonics as notated in Berio's *Sequenza I*



Example 8 – Harmonics as notated in Robert Dick's *Tone Development Through Extended Techniques*



These are just two ways in which harmonics can be notated. Harmonics require a different fingering than the normal fingering for that note, as can be seen in Example 8. Harmonics occur when the player fingers the root of the note and changes the air stream's speed and position to "over-blow" the note. When one can control where to place the air, all the notes in the natural harmonic series are possible. The higher the pitch is that the flutist is trying to get using harmonics, the harder it becomes to hit it accurately because the notes in the harmonic series get closer together the higher you go. This is somewhat shown in Example 8 – the first D harmonic is fingered using the lowest D fingering. Thus, you are playing an octave above the fundamental pitch. The next note in the harmonic series, the fifth

²¹ Robert Dick, *Tone Development Through Extended Techniques*, Revised Edition, (St. Louis, MO: Multiple Breath Music Company, 1986), 17.

note in the example, is the fifth scale degree – in this case, A. The next note shown, note 8, is the next note in the harmonic series, D two octaves higher than the fundamental pitch. For example, if we were to use middle C as the fundamental pitch, the natural harmonic series - the notes possible using only that fingering - are as follows continuing up the register: C (an octave above middle C), G, C, E, G, Bb, C, etc. To practice harmonics, one must have strict control and strength of the lips. In order to get the purest sound and ensure that all the partials are heard within the pitch, one should play the desired pitch using the normal fingerings with the best tone, and then the pitch using the harmonic fingerings, aiming to use the air in the same way as it is used with the normal fingering, but using the lips to produce the desired pitch. Always finish with low register studies after practicing harmonics so as to relax the lips after this strenuous muscle workout. Although most of these techniques had been heard of by the time Berio wrote *Sequenza I*, it was one of the first pieces to require the flute to play multiphonics, also called multiple sonorities.²²

Example 9 – Multiphonics



Multiphonics, like harmonics, require alternate fingerings. There are thousands of possible combinations that can be made with multiphonics. Every fingering has at least one multiphonic set that can be played with it – usually there are around three to six. The process of producing these tones is best described by Robert Dick, “The technique... is similar to overblowing natural harmonics, except that the air stream is broadened vertically to reach the target area of each pitch, and the air speed is

²² Laura Toledo Domínguez, “Solo Flute Pieces”, 14.

mediated between the velocities needed to play the notes individually. [...] [W]hile holding the lower pitch, gradually move towards the embouchure position of the highest pitch.”²³ While you are slowly adjusting your lips, there will be a point where both notes will sound simultaneously. This embouchure placement is what needs to be familiarized so that multiphonics can be played at the moment they are needed in a piece. The air pressure should remain constant once the multiphonics sound – while searching for the correct production of the tones, the jaw position and the angle of the flute and/or embouchure can be adjusted – not the air pressure.²⁴

In conclusion, Berio really explored new territory with his *Sequenza* series. He was either composing works using ideas that were new for him, or using ideas that were not often used in the musical community at the time. From proportional notation, to extended techniques, and even to composing the piece for a specific performer and incorporating their own personalities, Berio was innovative. By thinking a little outside the box, he was able to influence many twentieth-century composers and the way in which twentieth-century pieces are approached and performed by all. It is no surprise that his *Sequenza I* gained the title of the third major work for unaccompanied flute in the twentieth-century.

Luciano
Berio



²³ Robert Dick, *Tone Development*, 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14, 17, 26, 36.

²⁵ Picture courtesy of Dr. Suber's Facebook: Aspen Music Festival, Composers workshop, July-August 1980.

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